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UTILITY APPLICATION

OF

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FOR

UNITED STATES PATENT

ON

FLUSH MOUNTED LATCH

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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

"Flush Mounted Latch"

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

None.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 This invention relates to latches that are flush or near flush when mounted in a door or frame. Typically, the latch handle is contained with this low profile while not in use, but may be extended in some way to provide access to an operator. Once extended, the handle may be operated to open the door.

One example of such a generally flush mounted latch assembly is U.S. Patent No.
15 5,450,735, issued to Takanobu Esaki, et al. of Tokyo, Japan on September 19, 1995. Esaki discloses a pull-out-and-rotate type latch assembly. When locked, the latch handle lies nearly flush with the surrounding housing and door. When unlocked, the handle may be pivoted to an extended position and turned thereby turning a latching plate at the end of a spindle, allowing the door to be opened. Another example of a flush type latch assembly is U.S. Patent No.
20 5,457,971, issued to Kenichi Yamada of Tokyo, Japan on October 17, 1995. Yamada discloses a push-button spring-loaded rotary type latch assembly in which a torsion spring urges the handle into an extended position when a push-button is depressed.

In both Esaki and Yamada, the key cylinder is mounted in the handle and the shaft and latching plate can only rotate. Since the key cylinder is mounted in the handle, the length of the handle is dictated in part by how many fingers must fit between the key cylinder and the handle's pivot. Since the latching plate in each does not move axially but only rotates, it does not additionally cinch the door to the frame upon closing. Also, a separate push button mechanism is utilized to release the handle.

What is needed is a push-button type flush mounted latch assembly wherein the push button mechanism is greatly simplified. Additionally, what is needed is such a latch in which the key cylinder may work just as well if mounted in the housing rather than the handle. What is further needed is a latch assembly that causes the latching pawl to both rotate and draw in upon closing so that the door is cinched tightly to the frame.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to provide a door latch assembly having a latch housing and handle that are substantially or near flush with the surrounding outer surface of the door in which they are mounted when the latch assembly is in its closed position.

A further object of the present invention is to provide such a latch assembly that utilizes a push-button mechanism in order to release at least a portion of the handle to be pivoted to an extended position and grasped and turned by an operator. Another object of the present invention is to provide such a flush mounted latch in which the push button unit comprises a greatly simplified configuration. Another object of the present invention is to provide such a

flush mounted latch in which the locking cylinder itself may operate as the push button for releasing the handle.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a locking shaft that is slidably connected to the handle so that the locking shaft may move axially as well as rotate at the same time so that a pawl member on the end of the locking shaft may cinch down on the frame to create a tight closure between the door and frame.

These objects are accomplished by the present invention of a latch assembly having a latch housing and handle that are substantially or near flush with the surrounding outer surface of the door in which they are mounted when the latch assembly is in its closed position. The latch assembly utilizes a greatly simplified push-button mechanism in order to release at least a portion of the handle, which then pivots to an extended position and grasped and turned by an operator. A spindle and latching pawl are slidably connected to the handle and bound by a camming surface in the latch housing so that the spindle and latching pawl moves both axially and rotationally at the same time so that, upon closing, the pawl will cinch down on the frame to create a tight closure between the door and frame.

Other aspects and advantages of the present invention will become readily apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed descriptions of preferred embodiments when considered in conjunction with accompanying drawings, which illustrate, by way of example, the principles of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a perspective view of one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a top view of one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 3 is an exploded view of the embodiment of Figure 1.

5 Figure 4 is a perspective view of a camming surface of one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 5 is a side elevation view of the camming surface of Figure 4.

Figure 6 is a top plan view of the camming surface of Figure 4.

Figure 7 is a perspective view of a push button unit of one embodiment of the present
10 invention showing two retention members in which one retention member is partially depressed.

Figure 8 is a top plan view of the push button unit of Figure 7 in which no retention members are depressed.

Figure 9 is a cross-section view taken along the line 9-9 in Figure 8 showing a
15 depressible retention member not depressed.

Figure 10 is a cross-section view of a portion of the handle of one embodiment as shown in Figure 2 taken along the line 10-10 in Figure 2 showing an engagement surface having a ridge 65.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The detailed description set forth below in connection with the appended drawings is intended as a description of presently-preferred embodiments of the invention and is not intended to represent the only forms in which the present invention may be constructed and/or
5 utilized. The description sets forth the functions and the sequence of steps for constructing and operating the invention in connection with the illustrated embodiments. However, it is to be understood that the same or equivalent functions and sequences may be accomplished by different embodiments that are also intended to be encompassed within the spirit and scope of the invention.

10 Referring now to the drawings, Figures 1 and 2 show one embodiment of the present invention. In particular, this embodiment involves a low profile latch **10**, either flush or near flush with the surrounding top surface of the door or panel (not shown) in which the latch **10** is mounted. The latch **10** is comprised of a latch housing **15**, handle **60**, and locking shaft or spindle **50**.

15 The shaft or spindle **50** would ordinarily have a pawl member **90** mounted to it by any number of standard means. The effect would be that rotation of the shaft **50** would rotate the pawl **90** into a position to cause closure between the door and a mating surface on the surrounding frame or alternatively into a position behind the door so that the door may be opened relative to the surrounding frame. Similarly, axial movement of the shaft **50** causes the
20 pawl **90** to move in the axial direction so that when the shaft **50** is drawn upward toward the latch housing **15**, the pawl **90** cinches down on the mating surface of the surrounding frame and create a tight seal between the door and the frame. Additionally, the application may or

may not involve a gasket (not shown) between the door and frame. Either way, the rotary and axial movements of the locking shaft **50** are translated to the pawl **90** which is mounted on or fixed to the shaft **50**.

Figure 3 illustrates an exploded view of an embodiment of the present invention showing a latch housing **15** comprising a first chamber **20** and a second chamber **30** and a generally longitudinal recess **14** intermediate the two chambers. A plug or retainer unit **40** is rotatably housed in the first chamber **20**. On its upper end, the retainer unit **40** has a whole that retains handle pivot **62**. On its lower end, the retainer unit **40** has a pair of slots **44** that slidably house follower members **24**.

Handle **60** is mounted on pivot **62** and can pivot between a closed and extended position. Torsion spring **66** is positioned between the retainer unit **40** and the handle **60** urging handle **60** toward the extended position. In Figure 3, the torsion spring **66** is wrapped around pivot **62** of the handle **60**, but the handle **60** could be urged toward the extended position by any number of other means, including a compression spring anchored on one end in or by the upper surface of the retainer unit **40**, the other end imposing its compressive force on the lower surface of handle **60**. Other biasing methods well known in the art may be employed to bias the handle in the extended direction without going beyond the intent of the present invention.

When in the closed position, at least in part of handle **60** rests inside the longitudinal recess **14** of latch housing **15**, and is held in place by a push button unit **80**. In the embodiment shown in Figure 3, the surface of push button unit **80** has one or more handle retention members **84** which engage with one or more engagement surfaces **64** of handle **60** to hold handle **60** in the closed position against the urging of biasing means **66**. Push button unit

80 is urged upward by a compression spring **36**. The force of compression spring **36** may be easily overcome, however, by the operator who presses downward on the top surface of the push button unit **80**.

Additionally, the push button unit **80** may optionally also be rotatable. That is, the top surface of push button unit **80** made may be configured with a slot or other depression into which a matching turning tool may be inserted in order to impart a torque to turn the push button unit **80**. In such an embodiment, the push button unit **80** may be depressible by the operator only after the push button unit has first been rotated into the proper position. In all other orientations, the push button unit is prevented from being depressed, and the handle **60** will not be released, as discussed below.

As an example, in the embodiment shown in Figures 3 and 7 through 9, the push button unit **80** must be rotated first before it may be pushed, and it includes a key cylinder that may be rotated only by inserting a key made to operate the key cylinder. When the key is inserted into the keyhole and turned, the push button unit **80** rotates from a locked position in which it may not be depressed to an unlocked position in which it may be depressed.

The push button unit **80** of Figure 3, for instance, is prevented from being depressed by the interaction of handle retention members **84** with engagement surface **64**. At least one of the handle retention members **84** of Figure 3 is fixed and may not slide passed ridge **65** of engagement surface **64**. When the push button unit **80** is oriented so that this fixed handle retention member **84** is engaged with the engagement surface **64**, the push button unit **80** may not be depressed.

As shown in Figures 7 and 9, the handle retention members **84** also include at least one depressible handle retention member **84'** which may be depressed since it is partially inset in the push button unit **80** and spring-loaded by a compression spring **86** as shown in Figure 9. As a result of this spring-loaded effect, a sufficient downward force on the top surface of push button unit **80** can cause the depressible handle retention member **84'** to encounter a radially inward force from the ridge **65** of engagement surface **64** and thereby be depressed radially inward. As a result, ridge **65** is allowed to pass by the depressible handle retention member **84'** and handle **60** is released to spring out to its extended position under the force of torsion spring **66**.

In Figure 3, the handle retention members **84** are located on the surface of the push button unit **80**; whereas the engagement surface **64** is located on the handle **60**. This configuration, however, could easily be reversed. That is, the fixed handle retention members **84** and depressible handle retention members **84'** could be mounted in the handle **60** with the engagement surface **64** and ridge **65** fashioned into the surface of the push button unit **80**. In either instance, at certain angular orientations of the push button unit **80**, the fixed handle retention members **84** interact with ridge **65** of engagement surface **64** to prevent depression of the push button unit **80**, and at another angular orientation or orientations of the push button unit **80**, the depressible handle retention members **84'** interact with ridge **65** of engagement surface **64** allowing the push button unit **80** to be depressed. The result is that at this latter angular orientation or orientations of push button unit **80**, an operator may depress push button unit **80** and thereby release the handle **60** from its closed position.

Once released from its closed position, handle **60** is urged to an extended position where it can be rotated relative to the latch housing **15** thereby rotating the retainer unit **40**. A pair of slots **44** are formed through the lower end of retainer unit **40**. The slots shown in Figure 3 are closed at both ends, but a pair of slots that are not closed at one or both ends
5 could work equally as well, provided that the follower members **24** are otherwise bound to a range of motion within the slots. Also, Figure 3 illustrates a pair of slots **44** formed through a generally hollow retainer unit **40**, but if a generally solid retainer unit **40** is employed instead, a single slot could be fashioned through the width of the retainer unit **40**, which could function equally as well. Also, a pair of grooves rather than slots could be formed on the inner or outer
10 surfaces of retainer unit **40** to function as slots **44** as described herein.

In either instance, follower members **24** extend into the slots **44** so that the torque on the retainer unit **40** is exerted on follower members **24**. Follower members **24** are also connected to shaft **50** so that the torque exerted on follower members **24** is also exerted on shaft **50**. As a result, by rotating the handle **60**, the operator rotates the shaft **50** and the pawl
15 **90** which is mounted on shaft **50**.

Additionally, in one preferred embodiment, a camming surface **22** is either machined, molding, or mounted in the first chamber **20**, such as for example being friction pressed into the chamber. In the embodiments shown in Figures 4 through 6, the camming surface **22** has a local minimum and a local maximum and an identical pattern on the diametrically opposed
20 camming surface. Follower members **24** are urged up against the camming surface **22** by compression spring **26**, which may be positioned in a recess in the retainer unit **40** and forcing shaft **50** away from retainer unit **40**. In Figure 3, for example, an embodiment of the present

invention is shown in which the follower members **24** are the central portions of a cross pin **25** on either side of the axis of rotation of the shaft **50**, and the opposing ends of the cross pin **25** operate as cam followers. That is, the cross pin **25** is positioned in an orifice at the top end of shaft **50**. The cross pin **25** extends through the pair of slots **44** of the retainer unit **40**, and the
5 ends of cross pin **25** rest on the camming surface **22**, being urged up against camming surface **22** by compression spring **26**. Thus, cross pin **25** receives an angular force through retainer unit **40** when an operator turns handle **60**, in this embodiment, and rides along camming surface **22**, thereby causing shaft **50** to move axially as well as rotate between the latched and unlatched positions.

10 Alternatively, the shaft **50** could be connected to a second set of cross members, lugs or finger members, one pair extending through the slots **44**, and another pair resting on camming surface **22**. The embodiment shown in Figure 3 is a presently preferred embodiment because it involves a simple configuration in which a single cross pin **25** accomplishes both of these functions. This results in relatively simple machining and assembly steps, reduces the number
15 of required parts, and minimizes the exposure of the latch to wear and breakage. Other configurations, however, are equally contemplated by the present invention, including without limitation, using separate cross members in the place of the cross pin **25**, or housing the first compression spring **26** in the first chamber **20** rather than retainer unit **40**.

In the embodiment shown in Figures 4 through 6, a notch **23** is added to the camming
20 surface at each local maximum and each minimum. These notches **23** provide local stable positions for the handle-shaft-and-pawl combination within the range of operation. The notches **23** provide a “snapping” effect that is pleasant to the operator and so that the operator

can tell when the pawl and shaft are in the right positions, but the notches are by no means necessary. A camming surface without notches, as well as a camming surface of different shapes and orientations, would be equally effective to impart an axial force on the shaft **50** when follower members **24** are rotated as the result of the operator rotating the handle **60**. For
5 example, the camming surface **22** may be shaped so that the path of the pawl can overcome an obstruction on the backside of the door or frame. Also, a notch is not required at the closed position for the additional reason that the handle **60** will be returned to the longitudinal recess **14** and thereby held in place when closed unable to be rotated until push button unit **80** is depressed once again.

10 While the present invention has been described with regards to particular embodiments, it is recognized that additional variations of the present invention may be devised without departing from the inventive concept.